

REGULATION OF SANITARY LANDFILLS IN UTAH

Before the mid 1970s, few regulatory requirements existed regarding the siting and operation of non-hazardous solid waste landfills. Since that time, due to concerns about public health and environmental protection, additional federal and state regulation has been enacted. Following is a description of some of the changes that have taken place.

Landfills are now required to have construction and operating permits from the Utah Department of Environmental Quality and appropriate local government agencies. These permits contain specific requirements to operate the landfill in compliance with state, federal, and local regulatory standards.

Open burning is no longer permitted at landfills. In the past, fires at open dumps and landfills contributed to air pollution and dangerous operating conditions.

All landfills have attendants on the site to inspect incoming loads to ensure that regulated quantities of hazardous waste are not dumped, waste is dumped in designated locations, and scavenging is prohibited. Some kinds of wastes are segregated in specified locations to allow for recycling. Additionally, fences and gates are required in order to control access. Dead animals must receive special attention to minimize odors, insects and animal scavengers.

Daily cover is required for all disposed waste. This helps prevent fires, odors, windblown litter, insects and rodent. Cover also reduces infiltration of moisture; if not controlled, infiltration of moisture results in the production of leachate or drainage of liquids from the landfill and contamination of ground water.

Modern landfills are required to protect ground water. Requirements may include installation of clay or synthetic liners and caps, ground water monitoring, control of run-on and run-off of surface water, and proper separation of waste from the ground water.

Monitoring of explosive methane gas is also required at most large landfills disposing of household waste, in order to provide for the safety of citizens and nearby structures.

Final cover on closed landfill areas must be maintained to ensure continuing integrity of the landfill cap. Property deeds must have proper notations stating that waste disposal occurred on the property. Landfill owners and operators are required to have funding mechanisms for closure and post-closure maintenance costs.

All solid waste disposal sites are inspected on a regular basis to determine compliance with permit standards. Technical assistance is provided to assist landfill operators in correcting problems and maintaining compliance.

In summary, today's solid waste landfills are designed and operated to provide protection of public health and the environment. The evolution of improved landfill operation has not been fast, but has eventually resulted in much safer disposal of solid waste.

Specific questions regarding the regulation of solid waste in Utah can be directed to the Division of Solid and Hazardous Waste, Utah Department of Environmental Quality, at 801-538-6170.